

The Honorable Marc Barreca
Chapter 7
Location: Seattle, Courtroom 7106
Date of Hearing: December 17, 2020
Time of Hearing: 9:30 a.m.
Reply Date (per ECF No. 25):
December 15, 2020

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON

In re

PAKIE VINCENT PLASTINO,

Debtor.

Case No. 17-11760-MLB

RONALD G. BROWN,

Plaintiff,

v.

Adv. Nos. 20-01012-MLB
and 20-01013-MLB)

DEUTSCHE BANK NATIONAL
TRUST COMPANY,

Defendant.

REPLY IN SUPPORT OF MOTION
FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT BY
DEUTSCHE BANK NATIONAL
TRUST COMPANY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
A. Under her confirmed plan of reorganization, Stewart promised to make monthly payments to Deutsche Bank through November 2046, giving Deutsche Bank until then to commence a foreclosure.	1
B. Stewart's bankruptcy plan prevented Deutsche Bank from foreclosing, thereby tolling the statute of limitations.	2
C. Plastino's discharge did not accelerate his obligations under the note payable to Deutsche Bank.	5
D. Plastino's payments and acknowledgments restarted the statute of limitations.	6
E. Deutsche Bank holds the note and is entitled to enforce the deed of trust.	8

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page(s)

Federal Cases

<i>In re Crystal Properties, Ltd.</i> , 268 F.3d 743 (9th Cir. 2001)	10
<i>Johnson v. Home State Bank</i> , 501 U.S. 78 (1991)	4, 5, 7
<i>In re Mastro</i> , 465 B.R. 576 (Bankr. W.D. Wash. 2011)	3
<i>In re Moser</i> , 613 B.R. 721 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 2020)	10
<i>Thacker v. Bank of N.Y. Mellon</i> , 2019 WL 1163841 (W.D. Wash. 2019)	7, 8
<i>Thacker v. Bank of N.Y. Mellon</i> , 787 F. App'x 474 (9th Cir. 2019)	7

State Cases

<i>Arreygue v. Lutz</i> , 116 Wn. App. 938 (2003)	4
<i>Bain v. Metro. Mortg. Grp., Inc.</i> , 175 Wn.2d 83 (2012)	8
<i>Bartlett Estate Co. v. Fairhaven Land Co.</i> , 49 Wash. 58 (1908)	9
<i>Brown v. Wash. State Dep't of Commerce</i> , 184 Wn.2d 509 (2015)	8, 9, 10
<i>Bucci v. Nw. Tr. Servs., Inc.</i> , 197 Wn. App. 318 (2016)	8
<i>Coman v. Peters</i> , 52 Wash. 574 (1909)	6
<i>Deutsche Bank Nat. Tr. Co. v. Slotke</i> , 192 Wn. App. 166 (2016)	8

1	<i>Edmundson v. Bank of America,</i>	
	194 Wn. App. 920 (2016).....	5, 6
2	<i>Fetty v. Wenger,</i>	
3	110 Wn. App. 598 (2001), <i>as am. on den. of recon.</i> (2002).....	7
4	<i>Fid. & Deposit v. Ticor,</i>	
5	88 Wn. App. 64 (1997).....	9
6	<i>Glassmaker v. Ricard,</i>	
	23 Wn. App. 35 (1979).....	6
7	<i>Hamilton v. Pearce,</i>	
8	15 Wn. App. 133 (1976).....	6
9	<i>Jewell v. Long,</i>	
10	74 Wn. App. 854 (1994).....	7
11	<i>Merceri v. Bank of NY Mellon,</i>	
	4 Wn. App. 2d 755 (2018), <i>review denied</i> 192 Wn.2d 1008 (2018).....	6
12	<i>Merceri v. Deutsche Bank AG,</i>	
13	2 Wn. App. 2d 143 (2018), <i>review denied</i> 190 Wn.2d 1027 (2018).....	2, 3, 4
14	<i>Nance v. Woods,</i>	
15	79 Wash. 188 (1914)	9
16	<i>Price v. N Bond & Mortg. Co.,</i> 161 Wash. 690 (1931).....	9
17	<i>Spencer v. Alki Point Transp. Co.,</i>	
	53 Wash. 77 (1909)	9
18	<i>U.S. Bank NA v. Kendall,</i>	
19	9 Wn. App. 2d 1044, <i>review denied</i> 194 Wn.2d 1024 (2020) (unpublished)	7
20	<i>Washington Federal, National Association v. Pacific Coast Construction, LLC,</i>	
21	4 Wn. App. 2d (2018) (unpublished).....	4
22	<i>Weinberg v. Naher,</i>	
	51 Wash. 591 (1909)	6
23	<i>Wickwire v. Reard,</i>	
24	37 Wn.2d 748 (1951).....	6

Federal Statutes

26	11 U.S.C. § 363	3
27	11 U.S.C. § 524	5, 7

REPLY IN SUPPORT OF DEUTSCHE BANK'S
MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT - iii
(Adv. Nos. 20-01012-MLB and 20-01013-MLB)

Davis Wright Tremaine LLP
LAW OFFICES
920 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3300
Seattle, WA 98104-1610
206.622.3150

11 U.S.C. § 541	3
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State Statutes

RCW 4.16.230	3, 4
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RCW 4.16.270	8
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RCW 4.16.280	8
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RCW 62A.1-201(b)(21)(A)	8
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RCW 62A.3-301	8
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Rules

Bankruptcy Rule 4001(a)(3)	3
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Other Authorities

Wm. B. Stoebuck & John W. Weaver, 18 <i>Wash. Prac., Real Estate</i> § 18.20 (2d ed. May 2012)	9
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1 Deutsche Bank still has the right to foreclose. The Court should enter summary judgment
2 for Deutsche Bank on all claims asserted against it. This is why.

3 *First*, Stewart promised to pay back Deutsche Bank in monthly installments through
4 November 2046, so even if Plastino's debt were barred by the statute of limitations, Stewart's
5 debt under her plan remains outstanding and enforceable.

6 *Second*, whatever the effect of Plastino's 2007 bankruptcy discharge and his subsequent
7 actions, Olga Stewart's bankruptcy tolled the statute of limitations between 2010 (when she
8 filed) and 2016 (when Deutsche Bank declared her in default under her plan of reorganization).

9 *Third*, Pakie Plastino's 2007 bankruptcy discharge did not, in fact, accelerate his
10 obligations to Deutsche Bank. Granted, non-binding decisions issued in other cases suggest
11 otherwise, but they misunderstand the effect of a discharge and mis-apply binding authority,
12 including some from the U.S. Supreme Court.

13 *Fourth*, even if this Court decides Plastino's 2007 bankruptcy discharge did somehow
14 accelerate his obligations to Deutsche Bank, his subsequent actions in 2009 and 2010—including
15 his decision to make payments and to re-affirm his obligations—re-set the statute of limitations.

16 *Fifth*, although Ron Brown and James Rigby now claim to have doubts about whether
17 Deutsche Bank holds Plastino's promissory note or is the beneficiary of the deed of trust on
18 Plastino and Stewart's property, they had no such doubts when they filed their complaints.
19 Deutsche Bank is in fact entitled to enforce the deed of trust because it holds the original note, is
20 the named beneficiary under the deed of trust, and has been repeatedly recognized as such in
21 years of prior litigation.

22 **A. Under her confirmed plan of reorganization, Stewart promised to make**
23 **monthly payments to Deutsche Bank through November 2046, giving**
Deutsche Bank until then to commence a foreclosure.

24 Stewart promised to pay the debt to Deutsche Bank in regular monthly installments,
25 many of which are not yet even due or payable. Until all of her obligations are at least six years
26 past-due, Deutsche Bank retains the right to foreclose on the property.

1 Brown and Rigby do not appreciate the effect of Stewart’s 2012 plan of reorganization or
2 this Court’s order confirming that plan. A plan is effectively a new contract between a debtor and
3 her creditors. *See Deutsche Bank’s Opp.* at 6:19-7:2, ECF No. 30 (Dec. 10, 2020). It has the
4 effect of displacing the debtor’s prior obligations with those set out in the plan. *Id.* at 7:3-10.
5 Accordingly, the statute of limitations within which a creditor may take action to enforce those
6 obligations is calculated by reference to the date of plan confirmation, not earlier dates giving
7 rise to the creditor’s original claim. *Id.* at 7:11-8:9.

8 It does not matter whether Stewart signed the original promissory note or whether there
9 was a statute of limitations running with respect to Deutsche Bank’s right to sue Plastino.
10 Stewart’s plan governs the extent of Deutsche Bank’s rights with respect to its claim against
11 Stewart and her property. And Stewart’s plan could not be clearer. Stewart “shall tender regular
12 monthly payments” from December 1, 2012, to November 1, 2046. Am. Chapter 11 Plan at 4, *In*
13 *re Stewart*, Case No. 10-21227-MLB, ECF No. 130 (Bankr. W.D. Wash. Nov. 13, 2012).
14 Deutsche Bank was commanded “treat said loans as current and treat said obligations as an
15 ongoing amortizing obligation.” *Id.* at 14.

16 Brown and Rigby claim that Stewart’s plan does not affect the statute of limitations
17 because, in objecting to the plan, Deutsche Bank argued that the Court could not confirm the
18 plan under section 524(e). ECF No. 33 at 10:10-27. But the Court *did* confirm the plan, and the
19 plan *does* include provisions giving Stewart until November 2046 to make payments. Brown and
20 Rigby then argue that Stewart’s plan could not modify Plastino’s obligations. Stewart’s plan
21 could certainly modify *Stewart’s* obligations, and it did so by stating that she “shall” make
22 regular monthly payments. Even if the statute of limitations has expired with respect to
23 Plastino’s obligations (and, as explained below, it has not), Stewart’s obligations remain.

24 **B. Stewart’s bankruptcy prevented Deutsche Bank from foreclosing, thereby**
25 **tolling the statute of limitations.**

26 It is telling that Brown and Rigby do not so much as mention *Merceri v. Deutsche Bank*
27 *AG*, 2 Wn. App. 2d 143 (2018), *review denied* 190 Wn.2d 1027 (2018), in their response, and

1 only belatedly address it in their reply. *Merceri* is important because it stands for a simple and
2 uncomplicated proposition: “Under the plain language of RCW 4.16.230, the statute of
3 limitations is tolled during the bankruptcy stay.” *Id.* at 151. That is true even if a creditor is only
4 interested in pursuing remedies *in rem* against property. As the court in *Merceri* acknowledged,
5 the stay is “imposed on proceedings to obtain possession or exercise control of property in the
6 bankruptcy estate” and applies to “all acts by creditors to enforce their liens against the debtor’s
7 property.” *Id.* at 148 (citations and quotations omitted).

8 Deutsche Bank’s collateral was part of Stewart’s bankruptcy estate. As this Court already
9 held, the property was part of Stewart and Plastino’s marital community. Case No. 19-01037,
10 ECF No. 30 at 2. Stewart did not sign the note or deed of trust, but that does not mean Deutsche
11 Bank was free to ignore the automatic stay in effect with respect to her property. Case No. 19-
12 01037, ECF No. 30 at 2; 11 U.S.C. § 541; *see also In re Mastro*, 465 B.R. 576, 602 (Bankr. W.D.
13 Wash. 2011). Stewart’s plan forbade Deutsche Bank from pursuing any action against the
14 property because it remained part of Stewart’s bankruptcy estate. Deutsche Bank retained rights
15 under sections 363(f) and (k) of the Bankruptcy Code, which only pertain to property of the
16 estate. *Id.* at 5. She would not receive a discharge until after completing certain plan payments.
17 *Id.* at 13. If Stewart defaulted, Deutsche Bank could only obtain relief from the stay by sending
18 notice and giving Stewart the opportunity to cure. *Id.* at 5, 14. Absent a cure, Deutsche Bank
19 “shall be entitled to relief from the stay under this Plan” (*id.* at 14), and relief from the stay
20 would take effect immediately and without the ordinary 14-day waiting period imposed by
21 Bankruptcy Rule 4001(a)(3) (*id.* at 5). The stay therefore remained in effect with respect to the
22 property from 2012, when this Court confirmed Stewart’s plan, until 2016, when Deutsche Bank
23 declared a default under the plan.

24 It is no answer to pretend that Deutsche Bank could have sued on the note within six
25 years after Plastino’s last payment even if it was stayed from foreclosing on Stewart’s property.
26 Deutsche Bank could not have sued Plastino on the note because his *in personam* liability under
27 the note had been discharged. That means Deutsche Bank only retained its right to foreclose on

1 the property, a right that passed through Plastino’s bankruptcy without interference. *See Johnson*
2 *v. Home State Bank*, 501 U.S. 78, 84 (1991) (a chapter 7 discharge only bars the pursuit of *in*
3 *personam* liability on a debt, while leaving intact an action against the debtor *in rem*). And
4 because the right to take that action was subject to the statute of limitations imposed by Stewart’s
5 bankruptcy, the statute of limitations on that action was tolled under RCW 4.16.230 and *Merceri*.

6 Neither *Merceri* nor RCW 4.16.230 says that tolling applies only if the obligor on the
7 note filed for bankruptcy. RCW 4.16.230 operates whenever the commencement of “an action” is
8 stayed, not just when the commencement of an action against an obligor on a promissory note, as
9 Brown and Rigby suggest. In accordance with the words of the statute, the court in *Washington*
10 *Federal, National Association v. Pacific Coast Construction, LLC* held that an action to foreclose
11 on a deed of trust was stayed—and the statute of limitations tolled—by the bankruptcies of the
12 property owners, even though they did not sign the promissory note secured by the property. 4
13 Wn. App. 2d 1065, at *4 (2018) (unpublished). Here, Deutsche Bank could not commence an
14 action to foreclose on the property because it was protected by Stewart’s bankruptcy. Just
15 because Brown and Rigby believe there are *other actions* that Deutsche Bank might have
16 pursued does not mean that it was free to commence an action to foreclose on the property.

17 Nor is it particularly persuasive for Brown and Rigby to propose that Deutsche Bank
18 should have sued Plastino—after his discharge—to somehow “determine his liability” under the
19 note. First, to have any effect on Stewart, she would need to be a party to such an action, and
20 naming her would have violated the stay. Second, the debtor in *Merceri* made a similar argument
21 in that case, and the court rejected it by noting that RCW 4.16.230 applies to any action that is
22 “stayed,” even if there are steps that a creditor might conceivably take to move the action
23 forward. *Id.* at 154. Third, the only authority Brown and Rigby cite in support of this proposal—
24 *Arreygue v. Lutz*, 116 Wn. App. 938 (2003)—is irrelevant because it has nothing to do with RCW
25 4.16.230, the effect of the automatic stay, or even any statute of limitations of any kind.

1 **C. Plastino’s discharge did not accelerate his obligations under the note payable**
2 **to Deutsche Bank.**

3 Brown and Rigby should not rely on unpublished decisions from the Ninth Circuit or
4 dicta from the Washington Court of Appeals when those cases misconstrue the effect of section
5 524 of the Bankruptcy Code and binding precedent from the U.S. Supreme Court.

6 Brown and Rigby know that a discharge is simply a kind of statutory injunction that
7 prevents a creditor from taking certain actions to enforce a discharged debt against the debtor in
8 personam. It does not constitute “the complete termination of the Bank’s *claim* against petitioner.
9 Rather, a bankruptcy discharge extinguishes only one mode of enforcing a claim—namely, an
10 action against the debtor *in personam*—while leaving intact another—namely, an action against
11 the debtor *in rem*.” *Johnson* 501 U.S. at 85. Nothing in the Bankruptcy Code states (or even
12 implies) that the entry of a discharge order results in an acceleration of debts secured by property.

13 Perhaps recognizing that there is little hay to be made under federal law, Brown and
14 Rigby assert that a bankruptcy discharge accelerates debts under Washington law, and cite to
15 *Edmundson v. Bank of America*, 194 Wn. App. 920 (2016). In that case, the court held that a
16 creditor’s right to foreclose on property was neither discharged by bankruptcy nor barred by the
17 statute of limitations. Federal decisions based on *Edmundson* (and cited by Brown and Rigby)
18 depend on a single sentence—dicta—stating that the statute of limitations “for each subsequent
19 monthly payment accrued on the first day of each month after November 1, 2008 under the
20 Edmundsons no longer had personal liability under the note,” which the court understood to be
21 the date of the discharge. But what Brown and Rigby omit from their briefing is this, also from
22 *Edmundson*:

23 To the extent the trial court ruled that some event during the bankruptcy proceeding
24 triggered this provision, the court is wrong. Under the plain terms of the deed of
25 trust, this is an option to be exercised by the lender, not something triggered by
events in bankruptcy proceedings. Accordingly, as we previously discussed, the
statute of limitations for each monthly payment accrued as the payment became due.
There was no acceleration of the maturity date of the note.

26 *Id.* at 932. That is, of course, correct. The Washington Supreme Court, over a hundred years ago,
27 made clear that Washington law does not allow automatic acceleration: “mere default in payment

1 does not mature the whole debt, whether there be words of option in the agreement or not.”
2 *Coman v. Peters*, 52 Wash. 574, 578 (1909); *Merceri v. Bank of NY Mellon*, 4 Wn. App. 2d
3 755, 761 (2018), *review denied* 192 Wn.2d 1008 (2018). “Some affirmative action is required,
4 some action by which the holder of the note makes known to the payors that he intends to declare
5 the whole debt due.” *Weinberg v. Naher*, 51 Wash. 591, 594 (1909); *Glassmaker v. Ricard*, 23
6 Wn. App. 35, 38 (1979).

7 Plastino’s discharge enjoined Deutsche Bank from commencing or continuing an action
8 against him to recover his debt as a personal liability. It did not accelerate the debt under state or
9 federal law.

10 **D. Plastino’s payments and acknowledgments restarted the statute of limitations.**

11 Brown and Rigby concede that Plastino acknowledged Deutsche Bank’s loan and made
12 payments on the deed of trust after his discharge. They also do not dispute that this had the legal
13 effect of re-starting the statute of limitations with respect to the debt. Instead, they try to
14 minimize the significance of these facts by arguing that even if “the Bank is correct,” the last
15 payment or acknowledgement made by Plastino occurred on August 27, 2010, which is more
16 than six years before he commenced this latest bankruptcy in 2017. ECF No. 33 at 4:26-27. This
17 assumes that the debt had been accelerated by the bankruptcy discharge, even though
18 *Edmundson* held that acceleration “is an option to be exercised by the lender, not something
19 triggered by events in bankruptcy proceedings.” 194 Wn. App. at 932. But setting that issue
20 aside, Brown and Rigby do not recognize the power of a payment or other acknowledgment on
21 the statute of limitations.

22 “The underlying principle upon which partial payment will start the limitation period
23 running anew is that part payment amounts to a voluntary acknowledgment of the existence of
24 the debt and from this the law implies a new promise to pay the balance.” *Hamilton v. Pearce*, 15
25 Wn. App. 133, 138 (1976); *see also Wickwire v. Reard*, 37 Wn.2d 748, 759 (1951) (reversing
26 limitations defense judgment for debtor because “a voluntary payment was made on the note on
27

1 December 21, 1942, and that the statute of limitations was therefore tolled to December 21,
2 1948”).

3 Likewise, “an action barred by the six year statute of limitations applicable to contracts
4 can be pursued where there is a ‘written acknowledgment or promise signed by the debtor that
5 recognizes the debt’s existence, is communicated to the creditor, and does not indicate an intent
6 not to pay.’” *Thacker v. Bank of N.Y. Mellon*, 2019 WL 1163841, at *6 (W.D. Wash. 2019);
7 *Thacker v. Bank of N.Y. Mellon*, 787 F. App’x 474, 475 (9th Cir. 2019); *see also Fetty v. Wenger*,
8 110 Wn. App. 598, 603 (2001), *as am. on den. of recon.* (2002) (“The Wengers’ letters
9 effectively acknowledged their attorney fee obligation to Fetty, thus extending the statute of
10 limitations.”); *Jewell v. Long*, 74 Wn. App. 854, 857 (1994) (“when David Jewell gave the 1985
11 deed of trust, he acknowledged the 1982 debt and restarted the applicable 6–year statute of
12 limitations”).

13 Brown and Rigby try to sidestep this authority by arguing that Plastino needed to enter
14 into a formal reaffirmation agreement under section 524 of the Bankruptcy Code to revive the
15 statute of limitations. Other courts have addressed, and dismissed, this argument before.

16 The finding that the Plaintiff acknowledged the debt for purposes of the statute of
17 limitations is not intended, in any way, to constitute a finding that the Plaintiff has
18 reaffirmed a discharged debt under bankruptcy law. The finding is merely related to
the operation of Washington’s statute of limitations.

19 *Thacker*, 2019 WL 1163841, at *7; *Thacker*, 787 F. App’x at 475; *see also U.S. Bank NA v.*
20 *Kendall*, 9 Wn. App. 2d 1044, *review denied* 194 Wn.2d 1024 (2020) (unpublished). That is
21 consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Johnson*, which involved a chapter 13 plan
22 that re-scheduled a debt that had already been discharged in a prior chapter 7. The Supreme
23 Court recognized that an *in rem* obligation remains a claim even if *in personam* liability has been
24 discharged.

25 Brown and Rigby then assert that an acknowledgment or payment after acceleration
26 simply starts the clock running again on the accelerated balance, citing *Taylor v. PNC Bank,*
27 *National Association*, 2020 WL 4431465, at *3 (W.D. Wash. 2020). *Taylor’s* only authority for

1 this statement are the *Thacker* decisions, and neither opinion addresses or reconciles Washington
2 law holding that (1) acceleration is the prerogative of the lender, not the inevitable consequence
3 of a bankruptcy discharge; and (2) an acknowledgment or payment is fundamentally a new
4 promise to pay, and is interpreted as such. Under RCW 4.16.280, an acknowledgment creates a
5 “new or continuing contract” which reinstates the entire contract (and revives the statute of
6 limitations). And under RCW 4.16.270, a payment “made upon any existing contract” restarts the
7 statute of limitations.

8 Here Plastino acknowledged he would make future payments after August 2010, thereby
9 reinstating all installment payments: “I feel that with the help of the mortgage company we will
10 be able to move forward and stay current.” ECF No. 21 at ¶ 12; ECF No. 22-11, Ex. 11 at 8-9.
11 Thus, he acknowledged the past *and* future payments, reviving the statute of limitations on both.
12 Such acknowledgement and payments under RCW 4.16.270 and 4.16.280 revive the statute of
13 limitations with respect to the existing contract, which contemplated payments in installments.

14 **E. Deutsche Bank holds the note and is entitled to enforce the deed of trust.**

15 Deutsche Bank is entitled to enforce the promissory note and deed of trust. Brown and
16 Rigby’s belated assertion of stale “show-me-the-note” arguments does not help them.

17 The holder of a negotiable instrument is entitled to enforce it. *See* RCW 62A.3-301.
18 “Under the UCC, the ‘holder’ of the note is ‘the person in possession of a negotiable instrument
19 that is payable either to the bearer or to an identified person that is the person in possession.’
20 RCW 62A.1-201(b)(21)(A).” *Bucci v. Nw. Tr. Servs., Inc.*, 197 Wn. App. 318, 328 (2016). And
21 the holder of a note is automatically entitled to enforce a deed of trust securing that note. “[T]he
22 holder of a note has authority to commence a nonjudicial foreclosure.” *Deutsche Bank Nat. Tr.*
23 *Co. v. Slotke*, 192 Wn. App. 166, 175 (2016); *Bain v. Metro. Mortg. Grp., Inc.*, 175 Wn.2d 83,
24 104 (2012) (“deed of trust act contemplates that the security instrument will follow the note, not
25 the other way around”); *Brown v. Wash. State Dep’t of Commerce*, 184 Wn.2d 509, 529 n.9
26 (2015). That proposition is confirmed by prior authorities. “[T]ransfer of the obligation ... should
27 carry the mortgage along with it. This is indeed the universal result in American law

1 Washington decisions, though old, support this proposition.” Wm. B. Stoebuck & John W.
2 Weaver, 18 *Wash. Prac., Real Estate* § 18.20 (2d ed. May 2012); *Fid. & Deposit v. Ticor*, 88 Wn.
3 App. 64,68-69 (1997); *Price v. N Bond & Mortg. Co.*, 161 Wash. 690, 695 (1931) (“the note is
4 considered the obligation, and the mortgage . . . passes with it”); *Nance v. Woods*, 79 Wash. 188,
5 191 (1914) (“mortgage follows the note”); *Spencer v. Alki Point Transp. Co.*, 53 Wash. 77, 90
6 (1909) (“assignment of the notes ipso facto passes the security”); *Bartlett Estate Co. v.*
7 *Fairhaven Land Co.*, 49 Wash. 58, 63 (1908) (mortgage “passes to the assignee by an assignment
8 of the debt”).

9 Brown and Rigby start their argument on this point by asserting that “the allonges to the
10 Note do not name the Bank as payee.” That is not true. The last page of the note is stamped with
11 an allonge affixed by Impac Funding Corporation stating that the note is payable to “Deutsche
12 Bank National Trust Company, as indenture trustee under the indenture relating to IMH Assets
13 Corp., collateral [word obscured]-backed bonds, Series 2002-8.” ECF No. 22-1 at 10. Impac, in
14 turn, had received an indorsement from Alliance Bancorp, the original payee under the note. ECF
15 No. 22-1 at 6. So, contrary to Brown and Rigby’s argument, the allonge to the note **does** name
16 Deutsche Bank as payee. And there the matter should end.

17 Brown and Rigby have a further argument to make, however, which is that the identity of
18 the beneficiaries of the property that Deutsche Bank is holding in trust are described differently
19 in the note attached to Dorothy Washington’s declaration, in an allonge attached to a proof of
20 claim filed in Stewart’s case in 2011, and in an assignment to the deed of trust. The common
21 denominator in all those cases, however, is that Deutsche Bank is **always** identified as the trustee.
22 As the holder of the note, Deutsche Bank has the right to enforce it. *See* H. McCullough Decl.,
23 Ex. A, B (Dec. 15, 2020). It does not matter who has been assigned the deed of trust because the
24 deed of trust follows the note automatically, notwithstanding what a title report of unknown
25 provenance says. *See Brown*, 184 Wn.2d at 525 (2015). Deutsche Bank qualifies as a person
26 entitled to enforce the instrument. *Id.* at 526 (“By definition, the PETE [person-entitled-to-
27

1 enforce] is the person entitled to enforce the note, i.e., to sue in its own name and collect on the
2 note if the obligation has been dishonored.”).

3 Since it is Deutsche Bank that holds legal title to the note, not the beneficiaries, it does
4 not make any difference how the beneficiaries are described. “The PETE [person-entitled-to-
5 enforce] and the owner of the note can be the same entity, but they can also be different entities.
6 . . . [A] person *need not* own a note to be entitled to enforce the note” *Id.* at 525 (emphasis
7 in original). Deutsche Bank is responsible to the beneficiaries of the trust, not to Brown or Rigby,
8 to ensure that the proceeds of its foreclosure are distributed correctly. And if there is any
9 ministerial error in the identification of the beneficiaries, Deutsche Bank can correct it before
10 foreclosing.

11 Brown and Rigby do not cite any authority for the proposition that the Court should enter
12 quiet title for them under these circumstances. The only law that they do cite deals with the
13 standing of a party to commence and maintain an action against another person in federal court.
14 Deutsche Bank is not the plaintiff in this case. If Brown and Rigby think that they sued the
15 wrong person, they are free to dismiss their claims against Deutsche Bank. Of course, Brown and
16 Rigby know quite well that Deutsche Bank is the right person entitled to enforce the note and the
17 deed of trust, and not just because all the documents that they cite identify Deutsche Bank as the
18 correct party. In their complaints, they acknowledge Deutsche Bank as the beneficiary of the
19 deed of trust and repeatedly refer to Deutsche Bank in connection with the note. Brown 1st Am.
20 Compl., ¶¶ 1, 12; Rigby Compl., ¶¶ 2.1, 4.2 n.1. That would be inexplicable if they thought
21 someone else was the real holder of the note. “A party is bound by its admissions in its
22 pleadings.” *In re Moser*, 613 B.R. 721, 729 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 2020); *In re Crystal Properties, Ltd.*,
23 268 F.3d 743, 752 (9th Cir. 2001). Finally, it is useful to note that Stewart proposed, and this
24 Court confirmed, a plan of reorganization expressly recognizing Deutsche Bank as the secured
25 creditor.

26 * * *

1 For the foregoing reasons and for those set out in its motion for summary judgment and
2 response in opposition to Brown and Rigby's motion for summary judgment, the Court should
3 enter summary judgment for Deutsche Bank on all claims asserted against it.

4 DATED this 15th day of December, 2020.

5 Davis Wright Tremaine LLP
6 Attorneys for Deutsche Bank
7 National Trust Company

8 By /s/ Hugh McCullough
9 Fred Burnside, WSBA No. 32491
10 Hugh McCullough, WSBA No. 41453
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CERTIFICATE OF ELECTRONIC SERVICE

I certify that on the date of this certificate, I electronically filed the foregoing document with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send notice of the filing to the attorneys of record registered on the CM/ECF system.

DATED this 15th day of December, 2020.

/s/Hugh McCullough
Hugh McCullough, WSBA No. 41453